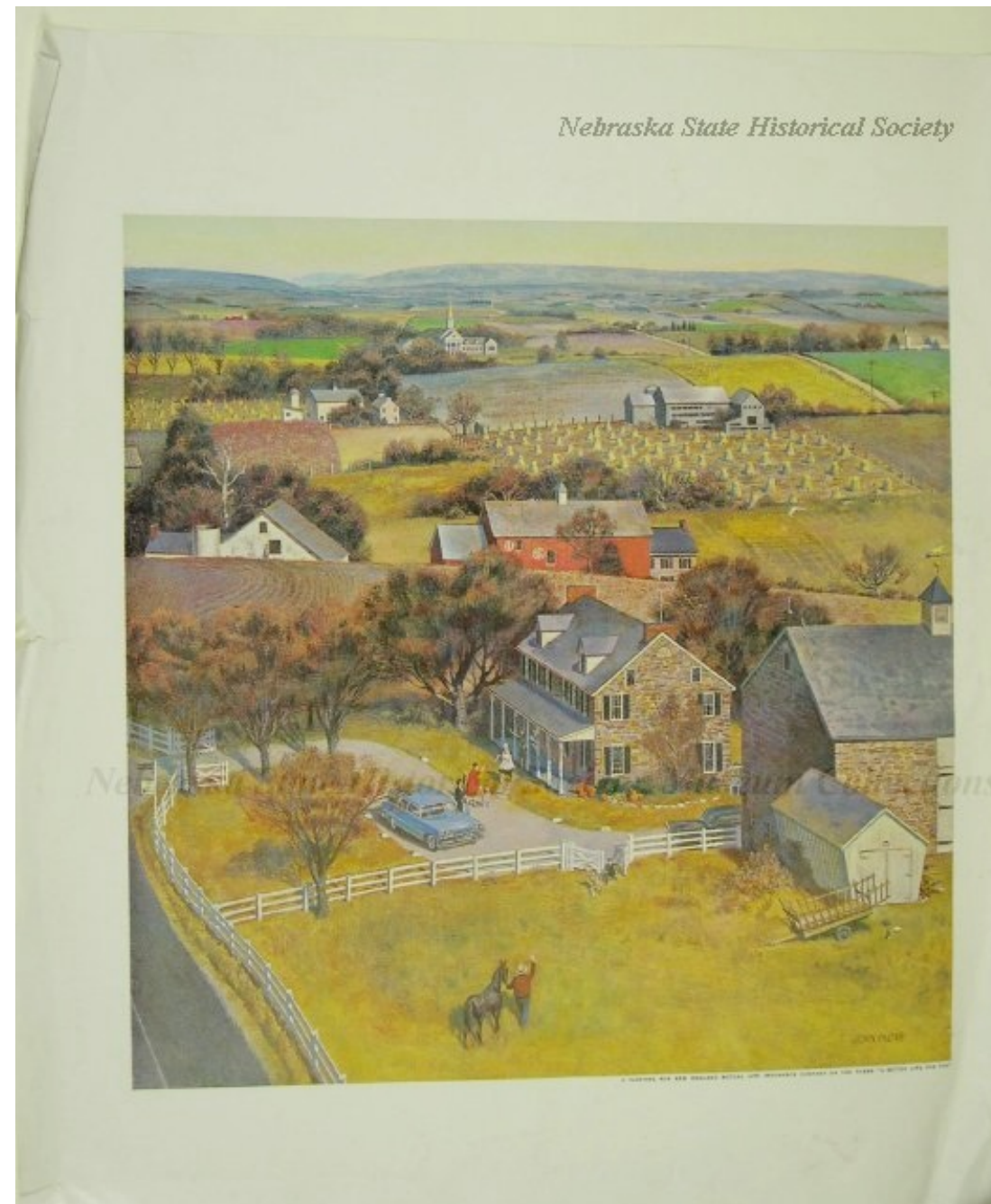


BY JACOB SORENSEN

The Progression of Farming In and Around Blair, NE



Agriculture



In this chapter you will learn about farms and about interesting Nebraska agriculture from the past. You will also learn how hard farmers had to work in the past and how hard they still work today.



Early Farming



Before the settlers arrived on the plains of Nebraska, Indians owned and farmed the land. The Indian tribes that roamed Nebraskan lands were the Ponca, Omaha, Oto, Pawnee, and the Kansa tribes. The Indian tribes made little towns out of sod and laid the houses all in a circle. They then farmed on the outside of their little village and went hunting for buffalo on the outskirts of their villages. In the Lewis and Clark expedition times, (1804), the Oto Indian tribe had to separate because the number of villagers quickly lessened due to the deadly disease of **smallpox**. Smallpox was a very deadly and common disease for Indians because there were no doctors to provide a cure for this disease.

Near present day Fort Calhoun lays Fort Atkinson. Back before the settlers, Fort Atkinson was occupied and farmed by over 1,000 American soldiers. The site for Fort Atkinson was chosen because Americans felt that they needed total control over the Nebraska Territory with the recent announcement of the **Louisiana Purchase**. The fort was occupied from 1820-1827. Fort Atkinson was also the first military post established west of the Missouri River and is one of the more popular and detailed historical sites in Nebraska. Along with farming and soldiers, the villagers of Fort Atkinson were in charge of the Western Fur Trade and controlled access to the Western Missouri River and Platte River.

To go along with the early Indians and Fort Atkinson, Mormons were an important part of historic farming in Nebraska as well. When Brigham Young marched through Nebraska he stopped here and farmed where present day

DeSoto is located. Young decided on DeSoto because the farm land was still good from when Fort Atkinson soldiers farmed it. The nickname for the summer farming season was “Summer Quarter”. The summer quarter began in 1847 where Mormons immediately started building houses, providing forage for the cattle, constructing bridges, and breaking up farm ground. An interesting fact of the Mormon houses were they were made of bricks that the Mormons scavenged from old Fort Atkinson chimneys. Brigham Young’s goal was to farm 1,000 acres but the Mormons fell way short of this goal and split 195 acres amongst 23 people. The main crop grown here was maize.



Homestead Act



The Homestead Act started up in 1862. The Homestead Act was a land act that means that if you came to Nebraska (other states included Kansas, Iowa, and Oklahoma, and South Dakota) you could claim a land piece that was 160 acres in size. If you stayed and farmed the land for five years, the land was yours. In addition to farming, the homesteaders had to make improvements to the homes including wells, bird cages, and plant trees. The significance of the bird cage was an alert system as birds could sense bad weather before it hit the plains. The houses built then were way different from the ones we build today. The materials used to make the houses were sod, dirt, and basically any material they could find. A huge disadvantage to the Homestead Act was that there were no trees around which made it very hard for people to build and keep themselves warm. The Homestead Act ran strongly for a long period before coming to a halt in 1898. Within the Homestead Act were many other little acts such as the Southern Homestead Act (which was the same as the Homestead Act but in the Southern states), the Timber Culture Act, which was an Act saying that if a farmer planted at least 40 acres of trees, he and his family got an extra 160 acres to farm, and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 which increased the farmers land to 320 acres. There was another land rush in the 1880s.

Reclamation Act

In the early 1880's another land rush brought a new mass of settlers to Nebraska. This resulted in land prices going to unrealistically high prices. But a drought occurred soon after driving all the settlers to head west. Then in 1902 Congress passed the Reclamation Act, which provided federal aid for irrigation to try and prevent droughts from effecting the growth of crops. Along with the Reclamation Act, the Kinkaid Act was passed in 1904, which enabled Nebraska farmers to buy fencing for their homes to keep their livestock in an enclosed area.

Hardships of Farming

There many hardships in early farming life. These included pests, floods, droughts, blizzards, dust-bowls, and natural disasters.

Blizzards

Blizzards were very hard to overcome. They were times where blinding snow blew at high speeds for an extended amount of time. During the blizzards, the farmers had to bring all the livestock into the homes to avoid having them freezing to death. Also, any crops that were currently growing were going to die. Another hard part of blizzards was the struggle to stay warm. In order to keep warm, the men of the house would need to go outside in search of buffalo chips. Buffalo chips were very easy to burn and extremely flammable. In the blizzard of 1888, children and homesteaders were trapped inside of their schools and homes for a period of 79 days. The snow piled 17 inches high making it impossible for any activities to occur. This blizzard was later named “the school children’s storm”.

Droughts and Floods

Droughts were very harmful to farm life because it was an extended period of time with no rain. Without any rain you couldn’t grow any crops. If you couldn’t grow any crops that meant you couldn’t eat. Along with starvation problems, droughts were very **detrimental** to livestock health. You can only rely so much on underground water and when that supply runs out, you have no rain water to drink!



Floods were pretty much the exact opposite of droughts. Floods were extended periods of time where it seemed the rain would never stop. I know you probably think that crops could never get too much water, but they actually can. Too much water causes all the soil to overflow which means that the crops aren't getting any of the nutrients they need to survive. Also in some extreme cases, flooding can flood your whole property which would limit all activity and give mother nature the chance to take away your livestock.

Dust Bowls and Natural Disasters

Dust bowls came usually during a drought. Dust bowls occurred when temperatures went way up in a very short time. During dust bowls wind caused dirt particles to fly every which-way and get into all the cracks of homesteads. The dust could eventually damage the crops and could blind the livestock. In some cases, dust bowls would turn into blowing ice storms. Blowing ice storms would occur when temperatures would suddenly drop at night. Ice storms were far more dangerous because it was the same as dust, but the damage caused was far more **severe**.

Natural disasters played a huge part in Nebraska farming. Even though there weren't very many disasters, when they came they hit hard. The most common disasters were tornados. Tornados would cause all livestock to blow away, and could sometime de-root the crops. The worst part about tornados were that they would cause mass destruction to the farmers homesteads.



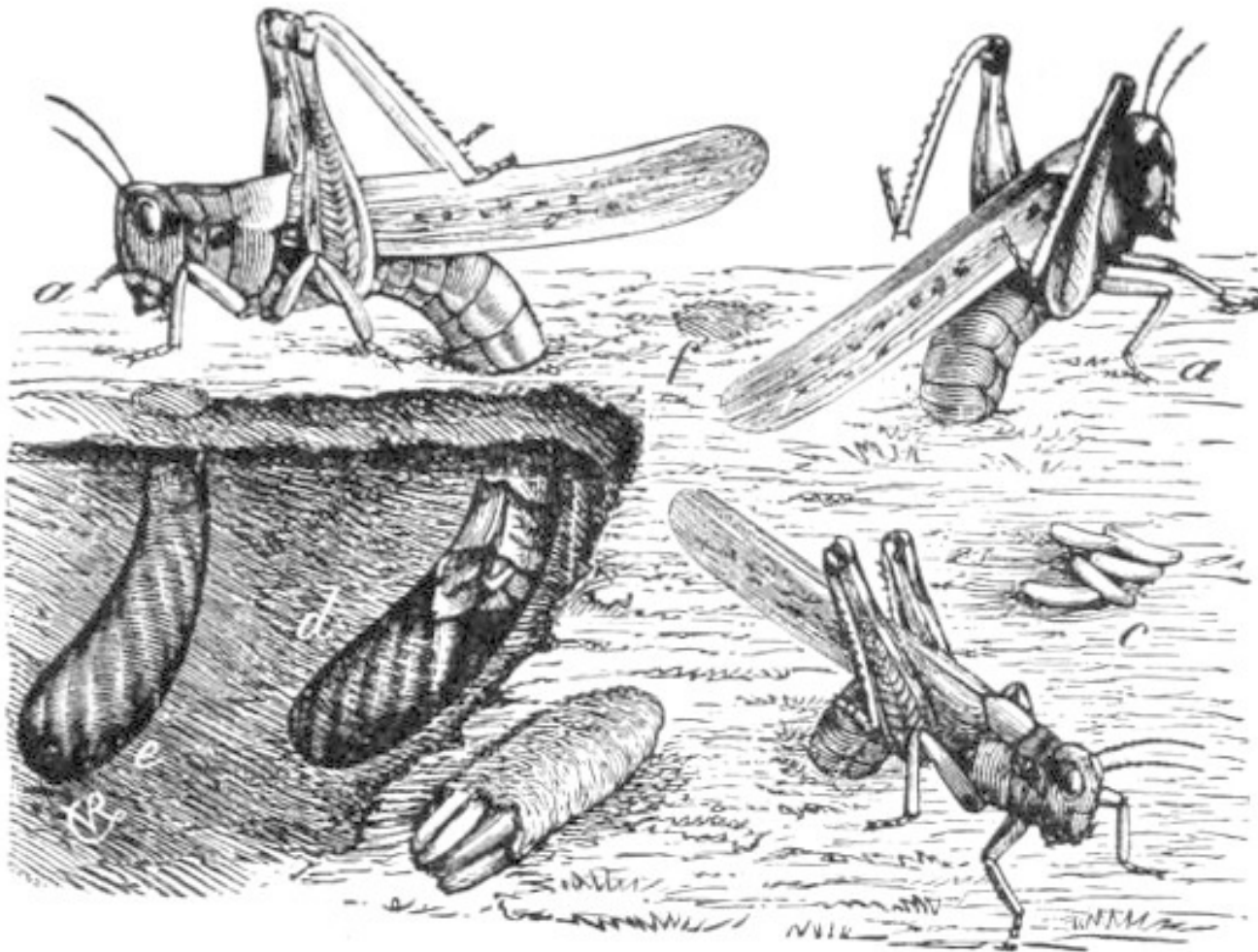
Pests

Snakes and Rodents

Snakes and rodents were hated all throughout Nebraska. As you probably know, the sod homes weren't the best at keeping away these pests. Snakes and rodents would crawl through the openings in the homes and get into the water supply and the food.

Potato Bugs

Potato Bugs were little beetle-like insects that ate all the potatoes farmers had grown. In some extreme cases, farmers had said they were afraid to walk out of their own doors. The scariest thing of all was that there was no way to prevent the potato bugs. Farmers tried chemicals but that just killed the crops along with the bugs. It was decided that the most efficient way of getting rid of these bugs were hand-picking



them from the crops. (This was also the least harmful method.) Since there were so many potato bugs, Nebraska got

the nickname “Bug Eaters” for a decent amount of time before it was changed to the “Cornhuskers”.

“Rocky Mountain Locusts”

Rocky Mountain Locusts, also known as grasshoppers, were by far the most dangerous of all hardships on the prairie. The grasshoppers would literally destroy everything in their path, including the crop. In one story it was said that the grasshoppers attempted to eat the livestock as well. There were times where the grasshoppers came in groups by the millions and nothing was able to stop them. In desperate times people would have to eat the dead grasshoppers because they destroyed all their crops and livestock. Thank God for pest control these days.

Farm Life



Historically, farm life in Nebraska was rough. The houses were built out of sod and dug out of the ground. They weren't the best things to live under. The homesteaders had to deal with hardships and pests every single day of their lives. In order to harvest their crops, they had to either use horse-drawn harvesters, or they wore huskers, which had a blade attached to the wrist and was used to cut the corn stalks.

When groups of houses were put together, villages were formed. In these villages were markets and blacksmiths. Blacksmiths were an essential part to historic farming because it was basically the only place where you could get custom tools or get your broken tools fixed. Blacksmiths back then got paid an average of \$0.50 per fixed equipment and around \$0.80 for a piece of custom equipment sold.

The women played a huge part in family's daily lives. Some of the women's jobs included doing the dishes, cleaning, cooking, watching over the kids, and milking the cows for their milk. Even though women were thought to be homemakers, some women bought land on their own. The first single women to own land through the Homestead Act came from Nebraska and was also one of the first settlers ever recorded.

The men's jobs were way different from the women's daily jobs. The men did most of the labor work including planting crops, harvesting crops, supplying livestock with food, and making sure all the cracks in the house get fixed.

Back in the homesteads and the villages, all the kids loved to get together and play games and sing songs. Some of

the more popular songs back then were, “Pitchfork Serenade”, and “Nicodemus”. On some nights, groups of adults would get together for **hoedowns**, which were events that included square dancing and playing the fiddle in hopes of earning some extra cash. Some of the kids favorite past-times were playing hopscotch, running races, and their favorite was playing baseball out on the frontier. As the villages began to develop, more entertaining things were put into place including auctions and bowling alleys. The first bowling alleys in Nebraska were put in Nebraska City. The bowling alley also included pool tables, croquet, and there were mini-wrestling meets where the winner received a little money.



Progress of Farming



As you probably know, farming has progressed **vastly** over the years. The technology used to power the machinery in today's farming compared to historic farming is just incredible. We went from hand plows, to horse-powered plows, finally to mechanical plows, and who knows what's going to happen in the future.

There are some little things that have also helped the farming industry progress. One of those things included row crops. Row crops helped harvesting by arranging crops in a pattern and way that made the harvest process go quicker. It also allowed more crops to be planted and allowed maximum space. Another little thing that happened were seeders and harvesters. Today we just drive machines to harvest and seed our fields, but in the past we've had to hand pick everything or ride on horses to harvest and plant. The harvest and seeding process helps farming today by making the process go way faster and more efficiently. It also disperses the seeds in an orderly way. The last thing that happened in farming that massively improved farming was irrigation. Irrigation helped the watering process of crops. You can now just place an irrigator in the middle of your field and tell it to start watering and it will. Also with today's knowledge, agricultural engineers are coming up with chemicals that help the growth of the crops but are also safe for the environment.

Reclamation Act

In the early 1880's another land rush brought a new mass of settlers to Nebraska. This resulted in land prices going to unrealistically high prices. But a drought occurred soon after driving all the settlers to head west. Then in 1902 Congress passed the Reclamation Act, which provided federal aid for irrigation to try and prevent droughts from effecting the growth of crops. Along with the Reclamation Act, the Kinkaid Act was passed in 1904, which enabled Nebraska farmers to buy fencing for their homes to keep their livestock in an **enclosed** area.

Question 1 of 6

How many acres did the Mormons actually farm?

- ☐ A. 1,000
- ☒ B. 2,000
- ☐ C. 650
- ☐ D. 195



Check Answer



Today's and Past Farming Industries in Blair

In this chapter you will learn about today's and past Blair farming industries.



Cargill



Cargill is a privately owned business that started up in Minnetonka, Minnesota and has expanded through mostly the Midwest, including one in Blair. Cargill began as single grain bin on an American frontier in 1865. Cargill steadily increased over the years into a multi-million dollar empire. Some of Cargill's main tasks are to supply food, make ethanol, provide food safety, sustain the environment, and provide a safe work environment. Cargill provides many jobs for people and is expanding each day.

Blair Milling Company



The Blair Milling Company started up in the early days of Washington County history. The estimated year was 1856. The mill was located at old DeSoto, or Mill Creek. It was also on land where Brigham Young once lived while he was on his march to Utah. Once Blair was declared a city, the mill moved into the city limits. The new mill was made of bricks that were saved from the old building, plus large pieces of timber that were made from cottonwood trees. Nobody knew the exact name of this mill, but in 1914 the mill went through some remodeling and it cost somewhere around \$4,000! That was a lot of money in the early 1900's.

Novozymes



Novozymes is a business that has one location in Blair. It's focus is to maximize the amount of crops but have as little **strain** on the Earth as possible. They are also working on fertilizers that don't release **toxins** into the environment and are **pesticide** free. They also want their customers to maintain a steady competition and make farming practices **sophisticated** enough to provide for future generations. Novozymes started up in 1925 and has increased since then greatly. Novozymes provides hundreds of jobs and also focuses on **bioenergy**.

Mount Hope Fruit Farm



The Mount Hope Fruit Farm was a store that was located in Blair but went out of business in the 1940's. Mount Hope was a huge transportation store that shipped fruit all over the world through the railroad. This store was privately owned, which means all the earnings went to the family that owned it, and all the crops sold were hand-grown by the family themselves. Mount Hope Fruit Farm went down in the 1940's due to the “**Armistice Day Freeze**” which was a day when the temperatures had a huge drop and killed all trees, and plants leaving the farm with no more fruit to sell.

Blair Incubator Company



In 1927, on West Nebraska Street in Blair, the newly founded company, Porter Incubator Company, was launched. It started out by making incubators, which are basically houses for nursing chicks. In late 1927, the company began operating as a commercial hatchery, and the company's name was changed to Blair Incubator Company. The company installed James Mammoth Incubators, which were the best incubators money could buy and could store 55,000 eggs at one time. All the chicks that were sold came from eggs that were approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A few of the quality tests were blood tests, proper feeding, ability to breed, and eligibility to have chicks. Along with the chicks, turkeys and hens were held on the poultry farm that was located at the same store.

CHAPTER 3 REVIEW

Question 1 of 5

Where did Cargill begin?

- ☒ **A.** a single grain bin
- ☐ **B.** Blair, NE
- ☐ **C.** Wichita, KS
- ☐ **D.** corn silo



Check Answer



Credits

<http://www.blairhistory.com/landmarks/schools/highschool/HYSooo6.htm>

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<http://www.novozymes.com/>

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<http://www.lewisandclarktrail.com/section1/necities/Omaha/firstnativecouncil/index.htm>

http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/timeline/dust-snow_1935.htm

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<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5646/>

<http://natureforkids.net/2012/07/>

http://www.blairhistory.com/landmarks/city_scenes/SEN0022.htm

Armistice Day Freeze

ar•mis•tice day freeze

The Armistice Day Freeze was an event that took place on November 11, 1940. The Armistice Day Freeze was a sudden drop in temperature which resulted in the killing of trees and plants.

Definition by Wikipedia.com

Related Glossary Terms

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Bioenergy

bi•o•en•er•gy |,bīō'enərjē|

renewable energy produced by living organisms

Definition by Dictionary App

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Find Term

Chapter 2 - Novozymes

Detrimental

de•tri•men•tal |,detrə'mentl|

tending to cause harm

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - Hardships of Farming

Enclosed

en•closed |en'klōz |

surround or close off on all sides

Definition by Dictionary App

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - Homestead Act
Chapter 1 - Progress of Farming

Hoedowns

hoe•downs |'hō,doun|

a social gathering at which lively folk dancing takes place

Definition by Dictionary App

Related Glossary Terms

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Chapter 1 - Farm Life

Louisiana Purchase

Lou•is•i•an•a Pur•chase

the territory sold by France to the US in 1803, comprising the western part of the Mississippi valley and including the modern state of Louisiana. The area had been explored by France, ceded to Spain in 1762, and returned to France in 1800

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Chapter 1 - Early Farming

Pesticide

pes•ti•cide |'pestə,sīd|

a substance used for destroying insects or other organisms harmful to cultivated plants or to animals

Definition by Dictionary App

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Chapter 2 - Novozymes

Severe

se•vere |sə'vi(ə)r|

of something bad or undesirable

Definition by Dictionary App

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Find Term

Chapter 1 - Hardships of Farming

Smallpox

small•pox |'smôl,päks|

an acute contagious viral disease, with fever and pustules usually leaving permanent scars. It was effectively eradicated through vaccination by 1979

Definition by Dictionary App

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Chapter 1 - Early Farming

Sophisticated

so•phi•sti•ca•ted |sə'fisti,kātid|

(of a machine, system, or technique) developed to a high degree of complexity

Definition by Dictionary App

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Strain

strain |strān|

force (a part of one's body or oneself) to make a strenuous or unusually great effort

Definition by Dictionary App

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Chapter 2 - Novozymes

Technological

tech•no•log•i•cal |,tekˈnəˈləjɪkəl|

of, relating to, or using technology

Definition by Dictionary App

Related Glossary Terms

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Find Term

Toxins

toxin |'täksin|

an antigenic poison or venom of plant or animal origin, esp. one produced by or derived from microorganisms and causing disease when present at low concentration in the body

Definition by Dictionary App

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index

Chapter 2 - Novozymes

Vastly

vast•ly |vastly|

of very great extent or quantity; immense

Definition by Dictionary App

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Drag related terms here

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Chapter 1 - Progress of Farming